



Town of Brookline

Massachusetts

Department of Public Works

Engineering & Transportation Division

TRANSPORTATION BOARD

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March 2, 2012

Jonathan R. Davis
Acting General Manager
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
Attention: Fare Proposal Committee
Ten Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Also via email to: fareproposal@mbta.com

Dear Mr. Davis,

The Town of Brookline is seeking the MBTA's assistance in minimizing the impact of proposed fare increases and service cuts to residents of Brookline and surrounding communities.

The Town of Brookline, like our neighboring communities in Boston's urban core, is heavily dependent on transit accessibility. Approximately 25% of Brookline households live car-free, and an even larger percentage own only one vehicle. Nearly half of all Brookline residents use some form of MBTA service on a daily basis.

Both groups span nearly all income levels, indicating that access to reliable transit is essential to the character of Brookline and the needs of its citizens.

It is truly unfortunate that the MBTA must consider service cuts at a time when the social, economic, and environmental benefits of public transportation are better understood than ever, and when transit ridership in greater Boston and across the United States is at historic highs. We understand that the MBTA is burdened with monumental debt and insufficient non-fare revenue sources, contributing to an unsustainable operating deficit. These crucial structural financial problems must be remedied in 2012 by the Massachusetts state legislature and MBTA management. We support the MBTA's own efficiency initiatives as represented in MBTA Efficiencies and Cost Savings, June 2011.

In the meantime, dire social and environmental costs of eliminating key services, and increasing fares disproportionately, must be avoided. Of the two fare and service change scenarios offered, Brookline favors scenario 1 (higher fare increases, fewer service cuts), recognizing that service cuts affect more riders more permanently than fare increases do. However, Brookline urges the MBTA to consider a hybrid scenario, along the lines of recommendations provided by the MBTA Advisory Board in their February 2012 Review of MassDOT Fare Increase and Service Cut Proposals. Specific suggestions relevant to Brookline citizens, businesses and visitors follow.

Under Scenario 2, two MBTA bus routes that serve Brookline and parts of Boston and Newton-- the 51 and 60-- would be eliminated. While elimination any bus route with decent ridership is undesirable, these two routes exhibit characteristics that make their reduction or elimination especially undesirable.

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- In terms of ridership, both routes are ranked well within the 50th percentile of all MBTA bus routes. In fact, the 51 is in the top 30th percentile among all routes, and based on data presented in CTPS's Impact Analysis, costs less per passenger weekdays (\$1.95) than the elimination standard (\$2.00) used in Scenario 2. Chestnut Hill Realty proposes to substantially increase the number of dwelling units within the Hancock Village apartment complex, a densely settled area along the 51 route, which would increase the number of transit users and reduce net operating costs per passenger.
- Large portions of the 51 and 60 routes serve neighborhoods that have NO other public transit alternatives. We estimate that the elimination of these routes will impact approximately 1,000 individuals, most of whom will be forced into single occupant automobiles.
- According to the MBTA's rider survey, 70% of trips on both the 51 and 60 routes are between home and work. 40% of trips on the route 60 bus are workers traveling to/from Longwood Medical Area, a congested location very dependent on transit.
- The 51 bus is the only transit option for many Brookline High School students who live in South Brookline to return home after school. The 51 makes a special detour mid-afternoon to pick up students at the high school, and it is invariably filled to capacity.
- Route 60 serves a large number of elderly individuals who are traveling to medical appointments in the Longwood Medical Area or to offices along Boylston Street in Brookline. Elimination of this service would force many of them into more expensive options such as THE RIDE or privately-operated taxis.

Prior to the MBTA proposing these fare and service changes, the Brookline Transportation Board's Public Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC) routinely held public hearings and discussions on the MBTA bus routes that serve Brookline. Feedback indicates that citizens rely on these routes, and have many ideas for increasing ridership. PTAC analyzed this feedback, schedules, routes and ridership data, and has specific suggestions for building ridership and operating more efficiently. Below is a brief overview of some of these concepts, which we would like to work with you to investigate further.

- A large portion of the Route 51 route is located in a relatively sparsely populated section of South Brookline, where on and off-boardings are extremely low. This segment, defined as the area between the intersection of Chestnut Hill Avenue and Boylston Street, and the intersection of Allandale Road and Grove Street, could be re-routed through a more densely settled section of Brookline in order to attract greater ridership without materially impacting the bus schedule. An example of this would be to allow the bus to travel on Route 9 (Boylston Street), Hammond Street, Newton Street, and West Roxbury Parkway.
- The 51 bus could conceivably have its southern terminus at the Roslindale Village Commuter Rail Station, reducing the length of the end-to-end trip, and thus improving on-time performance and operating cost per passenger. Statistics show that a very small number of riders boarding the inbound 51 before Roslindale Village actually travel all the way to Forest Hills. Similarly, very few riders that board at Forest Hills ride the 51 outbound beyond Roslindale Village.
- A truncated 51, terminating at Roslindale Village, could be merged with the 86 bus between Cleveland Circle and Sullivan Square. This would not only reduce operating cost, but would provide a one-seat ride connecting Sullivan Square, Union Square, Harvard Square, Brighton Center, Cleveland Circle, Chestnut Hill, South Brookline, West Roxbury, and Roslindale. Eventual improvements in the form of signal prioritization for buses would go a long way towards fulfilling the region's desire for an Urban Ring connecting these major population centers and transportation hubs. In less detail, we have also discussed possible hybridization of routes 51 and 60.

Brookline worked collaboratively with the MBTA in 2010/11 to identify improvements to Route 66 bus service that will improve rider experience and reduce costs through eliminating underutilized stops, relocating stops downstream of intersections, and other measures. While agreed-upon changes have yet to be carried out, we are hopeful that similar discussions with the MBTA about other bus routes within Brookline would be productive.

While we are not aware of data on how the E branch of the Green Line serves Brookline residents, business and workers, feedback from citizens indicates that losing E line service on weekends would remove an important way for Brookline residents to get to cultural destinations like the Museum of Fine Arts and

Symphony Hall.

As noted above, limiting fare increases is of less concern to Brookline than maintaining service. However, in spite of its affluent image, Brookline is a remarkably diverse community, with many low-income, elderly and disabled residents, so achieving fare equity is important. Under both scenarios, fares paid by seniors and users of THE RIDE would be disproportionately impacted in terms of percentage increases (if not absolute dollars), with fares for these users rising in some cases by more than 100%. We ask that the MBTA seriously consider a gentler, more equitable distribution of fare increases to avoid drastic changes for those least able to absorb them.

In closing, we thank the MBTA for your ongoing efforts to maintain service and increase operating efficiency in very tough financial circumstances, and for your responsible analysis of various service and fare change options and impacts. Brookline's Transportation Board and Public Transportation Advisory Committee stand ready to discuss with MBTA staff what needs to be done to continue to provide our citizens with a reliable, affordable, and world-class public transportation network.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Safer', with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

Joshua D. Safer, Chairman
Brookline Transportation Board

Cc: Brookline Board of Selectmen
Melvin Kleckner, Brookline Town Administrator
Richard A. Davey, Secretary and Chief Executive Officer, MassDOT
Paul Regan, Executive Director, MBTA Advisory Board
Richard Leary, Brookline Representative, MBTA Advisory Board Finance Committee
Cynthia Stone Creem, Massachusetts State Senator
Michael J. Moran, State Representative
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